Rep. Slaughter Introduces Genetic Information Non Discrimination Act

Act Aimed at Promoting Medical Advancements and Protecting Consumers' Rights

Washington, DC - Rep. Louise M. Slaughter, today, with a bipartisan coalition of Members of Congress introduced legislation which seeks to prohibit improper use of genetic information for workforce and insurance decisions.

The Genetic Information Non Discrimination Act will protect genetic information to encourage both the public and scientific communities to take full advantage of the important opportunities genetics offer in revolutionizing quality health care in our nation.   The bill, identical to S. 306 which passed the Senate by a vote of 98-0 in February, was introduced by Representatives Judy Biggert (R-IL), Louise Slaughter (D-NY), Bob Ney (R-OH), and Anna Eshoo (D-CA) and includes a strong group of 30 bipartisan cosponsors.

"**For nearly a decade, I have championed this legislation because the American people have a right to expect that when they make the decision to undergo genetic testing, their private genetic information will be protected from abuse**   ," Rep. Slaughter said. "
Two Presidents, Two Senates, and legions of Americans have endorsed this bill. Its time for the House to act
," she added.

Rep. Slaughter, a microbiologist with a Master's Degree in Public Health, has led the fight in the House to pass legislation to ban genetic discrimination since 1995. In the last Congress, Rep. Slaughter's bill, H.R. 1910, the Genetics Information Nondiscrimination in Health Insurance and Employment Act, had 242 bipartisan co-sponsors and was supported by over 300 organizations. Last year, the House Republican leadership refused to bring the measure up for a vote, despite passage by the Senate and a strong statement of support by President Bush.

"In Congress after Congress, the Republican leadership has stood in the way of this very important anti-discrimination law," said Rep. Slaughter. "We cannot allow the Republican leadership to hold this legislation hostage any longer. Americans need to know that they can make the pro-active decision to undergo genetic testing without fear of losing their job or their health insurance," she continued.

One of the most significant scientific accomplishments in history has been sequencing the human genetic code - a breakthrough that is already transforming the battle against a broad range of medical conditions. As a result, scientists have identified genetic markers for a variety of chronic health conditions and this increases the potential for early treatment and prevention. Genetic testing can improve lives by providing information on how to avoid future health problems, and cope more effectively with conditions and associated costs. The development and utilization of genetic information will also result in a maturation of the personalized medicine market, with American companies in the molecular testing market predicted to generate $4.2 billion in revenues by 2006.

Unfortunately, the ability to predict disease through genetic testing and family history opens the door for discrimination, particularly in the employment and health insurance industries. Such a threat has deterred the public and science from taking full advantage of the important opportunities which genetic information provides. Without appropriate protections to encourage providers, the health care community and the public to embrace genetic testing, the health care arena will be incapable of taking full advantage of the important opportunities resulting from the advancement of genetic information and technology.

"**A variety of protections exist in current federal and state laws to prevent employers and insurers from denying job opportunities or health coverage on the basis of genetic information. The Genetic Information Non Discrimination Act will specify that genetic information must be protected in both insurance and employment settings**," said Rep. Slaughter.